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SUBJECT: TURKISH PRESIDENT SENDS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
ON DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS TO REFERENDUM

REF: ANKARA 1180

¶1. (U) President Sezer declined on June 15 to approve a controversial constitutional amendments that would allow for direct presidential elections, sending the package to referendum instead. Sezer also plans to apply to the constitutional court to annul the amendments on unspecified procedural grounds. Due to a required 120-day waiting period, a referendum would occur in October and could not be held simultaneously with the July 22 general elections. If the court annuls the package before the 120-day waiting period expires, the referendum will be cancelled.

¶2. (U) The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) attempted to reduce the waiting period from 120 to 45 days, in order to allow a referendum on the amendment package to coincide with the July elections. Parliament adopted the change in its final days in session. President Sezer, who has until June 18 to act, is expected to veto the measure and return it to parliament's constitutional committee. With more than half the committee members dropped as candidates for the upcoming elections and campaigning well-underway by others, AKP is unlikely to be able to assemble the numbers needed for further action.

¶3. (U) The constitutional court is currently studying an annulment application filed earlier by main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). CHP claims the amendments should be invalidated for voting irregularities. The court will combine the two applications once the president files his challenge. According to Acting Constitutional Court President Hasim Kilic, the matter will be put on the docket once the court reporter has finished reviewing the case.

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